

CAI-SAN
The Dramatic Story of Resettlement and Land Reform
in
the "Rice Bowl" of the Republic of Viet-Nam

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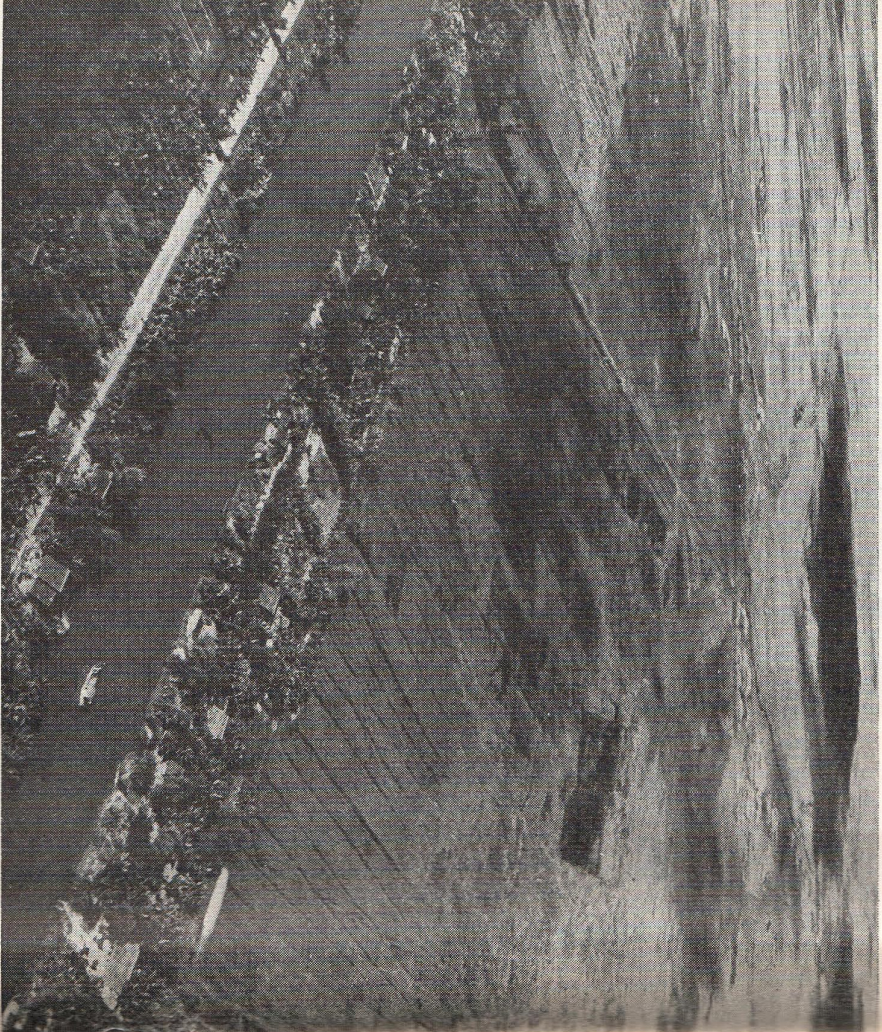
Prof. James R. Roach

C A I - S A N

The Dramatic Story of Resettlement and Land Reform

in

the "Rice Bowl" of the Republic of Viet-Nam



AIR PANORAMIC VIEW OF CAI SAN. THIS EARTH LONG UNTILLED IS NOW FURROWED BY IRRIGATION CANALS CARVING LONG PLOTS OF FERTILE RICEFIELDS. — WHERE BEFORE EYES PERCEIVED ONLY A PARCHED OPEN COUNTRY, WE NOW SEE RICH HARVESTS TO FEET THE REFUGEE FAMILIES FROM NORTH VIETNAM

CAI - SAN

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Southwest of Saigon, 125 miles by road, 90 by air, there lies a great rectangular slice of the vast fertile Mekong River delta, criss-crossed by canals and subdivided into an infinity of green patches that turn yellow, brown and grey with the passing seasons.

These are the rice paddies of Cai-San, and this is the region whose rich resources have — more than anywhere else in the whole delta — earned the title : « Rice Bowl of Asia ».

History and Geography.

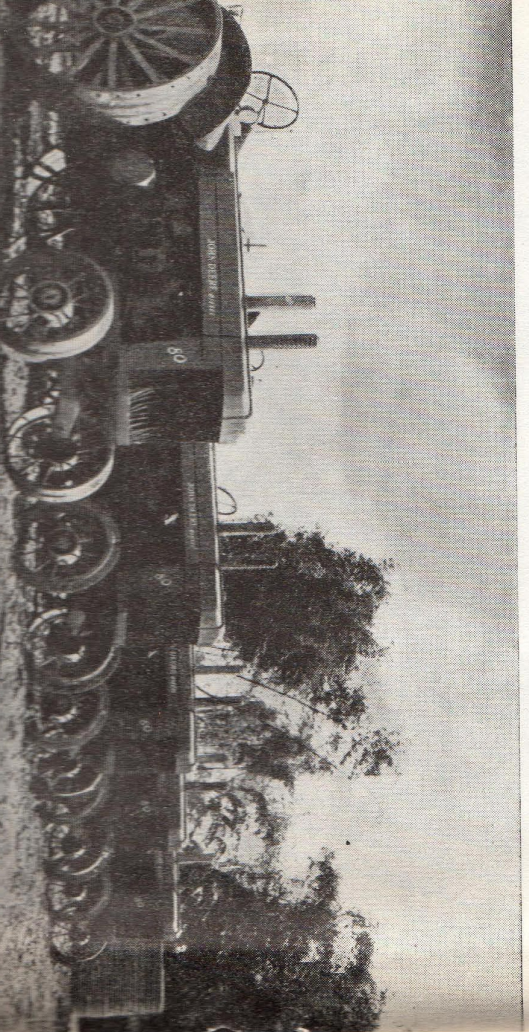
Yet during ten long years of civil war, most of this region and the rest of the delta lay fallow, abandoned by its farmers who had come as pioneers to clear the land and cultivate rice and other crops for themselves, their compatriots, and for export by the nation. Only

in the last years have they been able to return under the auspices of the Government of President Ngo-dinh-Diem, which has inaugurated a program of resettlement and land reform known, for this region, as the Cai-San Project.

Other regions, including the mountain highlands, are benefiting from other projects. Conditions vary from one region to another, even in the Mekong delta ; so that each presents different problems which must be treated separately by the combined efforts of the Government departments most directly concerned : The Secretariats of State for Land Reform, for Agriculture, for Public Works, and the Refugee Commission. Cai-San is typical and unique in the problems it offers and in the way in which the challenge has been met by the Government of President Ngo-dinh-Diem.

From the air, the region stands out as clearly as on the map : Cai-San is a great rectangle 35 miles long and 16 wide which encloses 270,000 acres. It is defined at the corners by the four towns of Rach-Gia, Lang-Thanh, Thot-Not and Long-Xuyen. Bounded by canals on

MODERNIZING : POWERFUL TRACTOR COMPANIES...

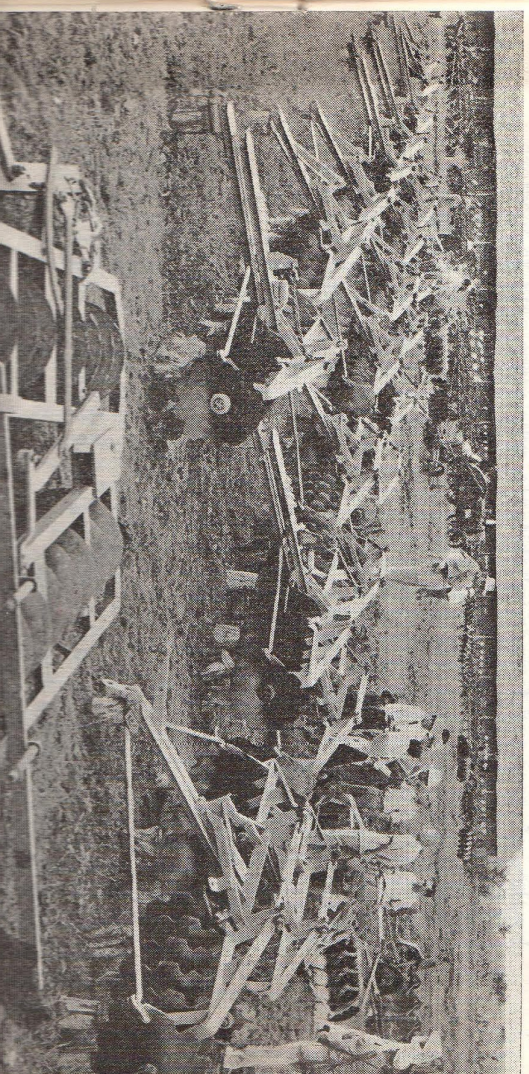


the east and west, the Bassac River (southernmost branch of the mighty Mekong) defines the northern boundary, while to the south lies the Gulf of Siam. Except for the man-made canals and roads, towns and rice fields, the immense plain and the sea extend without relief to the four horizons. Only to the west can there be seen the hazy blue peaks of the Seven Mountains which relieve the monotony during the daytime and heighten the beauty of the blazing sun as it sets in a cloudless sky.

The Inhabitants.

From the ground, the severe landscape assumes an entirely different aspect as one follows the road along the central Rachgia-Bassac canal, which longitudinally divides the region of Cai-San. Clusters of straw huts are set in the midst of banana trees, coconut palms and sugar cane, as well as other forms of lush tropical

... BATTALIONS OF PLOUGHS ARE READY TO MULTIPLY THE HUMAN EFFORTS AND RESTORE THE EARTH TO GIVE IT FULLNESS



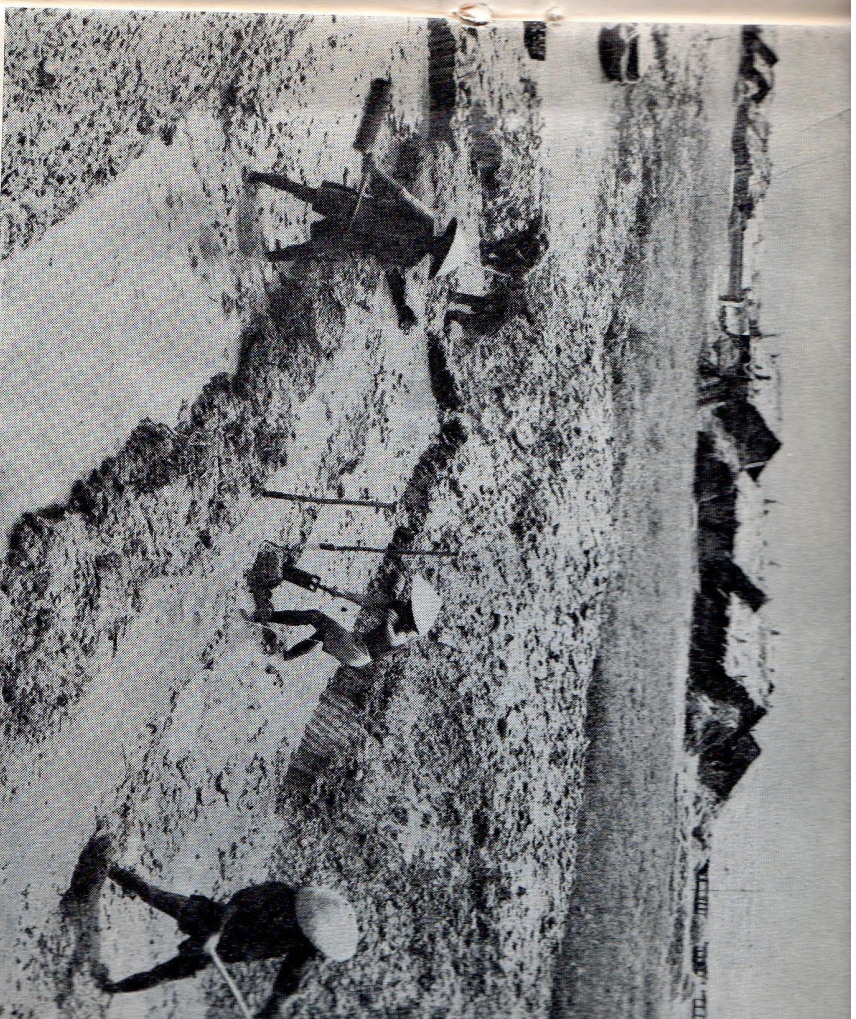
vegetation that provide nothing more useful than shade. Shops and other buildings near the market are more solidly constructed of concrete blocks and plaster with tile or corrugated iron roofs. And on the waters of the canal itself, sampans of all sizes with square or triangular sails ply back and forth with heavy loads which the family aboard dextrously help along with stout poles.

More than 20,000 former inhabitants of the region have returned to cultivate the rice fields which stretch away across the immense plain, infinitely repeating themselves to the horizon and beyond. Working by their sides in the rice-fields and plying their own sampans up and down the newly-dug canals, there have also come 50,000 refugees from the communist North. Different in their features from their southern compatriots, somewhat lighter in colour, their Tonkinese origin is also apparent from their maroon clothing and by the names they have given to the canals, which carry signs at the entrance reading : « Hanoi » or « Kien-An ».

The Canals.

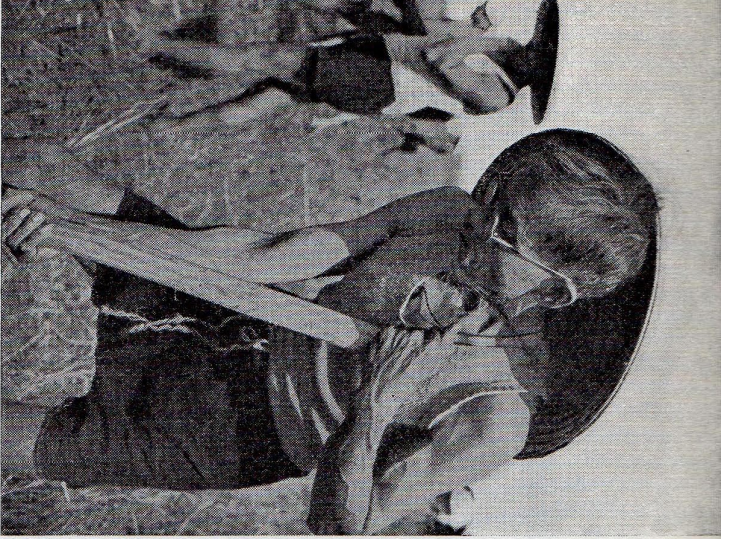
Seventeen canals totalling 125 miles in length have been dug by the refugees and former inhabitants, who were paid 35 piasters (US \$1.00) for each of 1,860,000 cubic meters of the rich clay soil which had to be removed and piled into dikes along the banks. As an example of the amazing speed with which this work of resettlement and land reform has progressed, let us note that 3,000 workmen took only seven days to dig a canal more than 14 miles long !

The canals serve a triple purpose : First as a means of transportation in an area where roads are not only impracticable for the most part but also detrimental to cultivation ; there are foot and bicycle paths along the banks of each canal, but most inhabitants use the small boat which has been given to each family. Second, the canals are necessary to drain the region in floodtime and, third, to irrigate it during the dry season.



FOR MANY WORKS NO MACHINE IS BETTER THAN TWO ROBUST ARMS. FEET CLENCHED IN CLOD, WITH SHOVEL IN HAND, WHICH MANNER IS THE SAME SINCE CENTURIES, THESE PEASANTS STRIVE TO DISCIPLINE EARTH AND WATER

From the map, it can be seen that the Cai-San region is not only divided longitudinally by the central Rachgia-Bassac canal, but also into the northern zone of Long-Xuyen and the southern zone of Rach-Gia. Special types of « floating rice » are grown in the northern lowlands, which are irrigated by the annual fresh water floods of the Mekong River ; while the higher land in the southern zone, where the usual kinds of rice are grown, is irrigated by the combined effects of fresh water flooding and the ocean tides from the Gulf of Siam.



AGED AND YOUNG PEOPLE
ARE WORKING WITH THE SAME
EAGERNESS

Resettlement and Reclamation.

Until ten years ago, most of the region, both North and South, had been cleared and cultivated by pioneers, most of whom were small landowners. Hindered as they were by the lack of man power and draft buffalo as well as by the difficulty of communication due to the insufficient canal system, they had nonetheless made great progress. But then came the civil war. The farmers were forced to abandon their rice paddies, which subsequently became overgrown with weeds and infested by rodents. The only rice-fields that remained under cultivation were those grouped around villages where the farmers could take refuge from the Communist Viet-Minh, which terrorized the southern Rach-Gia zone, and the rebel Hoa Hao sect, which occupied the Long-Xuyen zone in the north.

One of the first tasks of the Government of President Ngo-dinh-Diem, after it had established the independence of the nation in 1954,

was to bring security to Cai-San and elsewhere throughout the countryside of South Viet-Nam. As this task was accomplished, the original farmers left the cities and returned to the land. But at the same time, it was only too evident that their efforts alone would be inadequate either to exploit fully the great resources of the region or even to reclaim the overgrown land as quickly as necessary. More farmers as well as financial aid and technical advice were absolutely essential.

The land along either side of the central Rachgia-Bassac canal was reserved for the 20,000 former inhabitants of the region, while the refugees have been settled along the secondary canals which run perpendicular to the main one. Thus in visiting one of these secondary canals by boat, the first houses which line either side of the canal begin some 600 yards from the canal's entrance. Each is built on an allotted 3 hectares (7.41 acres) per refugee family. They are set back

EVEN IN THE MACHINE AGE IT'S NECESSARY TO HAVE RECOURSE TO THESE
LOWLY BUT USEFUL SERVANTS, BUFFALOES AND OXEN

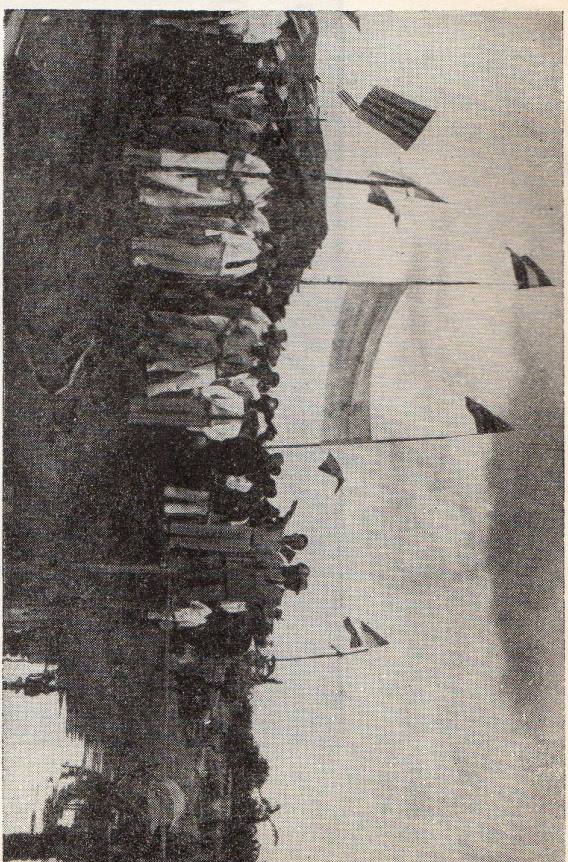
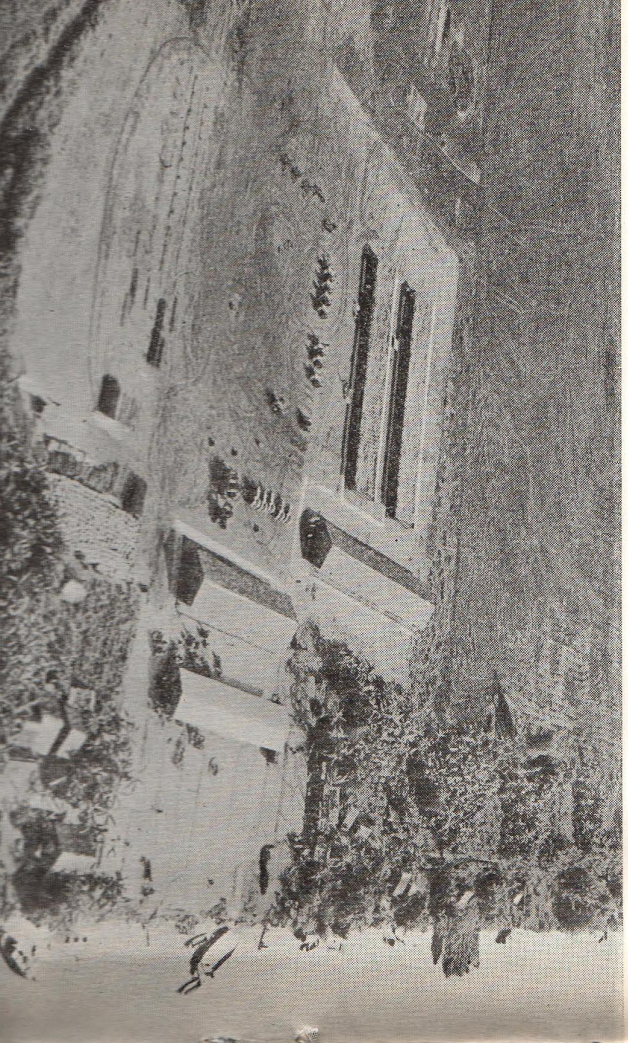


on an artificial ridge of land about 20 yards from the canal's edge. Simple straw huts, they are nevertheless clean and sturdy with corner posts sunk several yards deep in the ground for protection against uprooting by typhoon winds. The floors are of beaten earth, the walls and roofs of tightly woven coconut tree leaves and other natural fibres which keep out the wind and rain.

Visitors, as they arrive by outboard motor boat, are greeted by dozens of children who jump up and down with cries of joy, then rush to the water's edge when they splash their toes in the waves thrown up by the wake of the boats. The plump cheeks and eager expressions on the faces of these small boys and girls leave a lasting first impression of a healthy happy population.

Though the houses stretch out along the canals as far as the eye can reach, each house belongs to a village whose centre consists of several shops, a parish church or pagoda and a school which serves

A VILLAGE : ON A LARGE RAISED STRIP OF EARTH LONG HUTS ARE SET IN LINES. THE IMPRESSION OF THE PANORAMIC VIEW IS THAT OF GEOMETRIC NEATNESS AND STRICT CLEANNESS



THE PRESIDENT NGO DINH DIEM IS PAYING CONSTANT ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF THE REFUGEES OF NORTH VIETNAM RESETTLED IN THE CAI SAN PROJECT WHICH THE PRESIDENT RECENTLY INSPECTED TO ASCERTAIN HIMSELF THE PROGRESS OF THE FARMING WORK. THE PRESIDENT IS SHOWN HERE LISTENING TO THE EXPLANATIONS OF A FARMER

also as village meeting house. In the beginning and until very recently, the spiritual leader of each village — its Catholic priest, Protestant pastor or Buddhist bonze — served also as its administrative leader. For in most cases it was under his leadership that the whole village fled south together from the communist North. The church and the school house are build on a larger scale but mostly from the same materials as the private homes. The Church altar is made of wood and on a raised platform, and some other buildings have wooden walls and corrugated iron roofs, but all have beaten earth floors. In place of a bell, an old automobile wheel hangs outside the church.

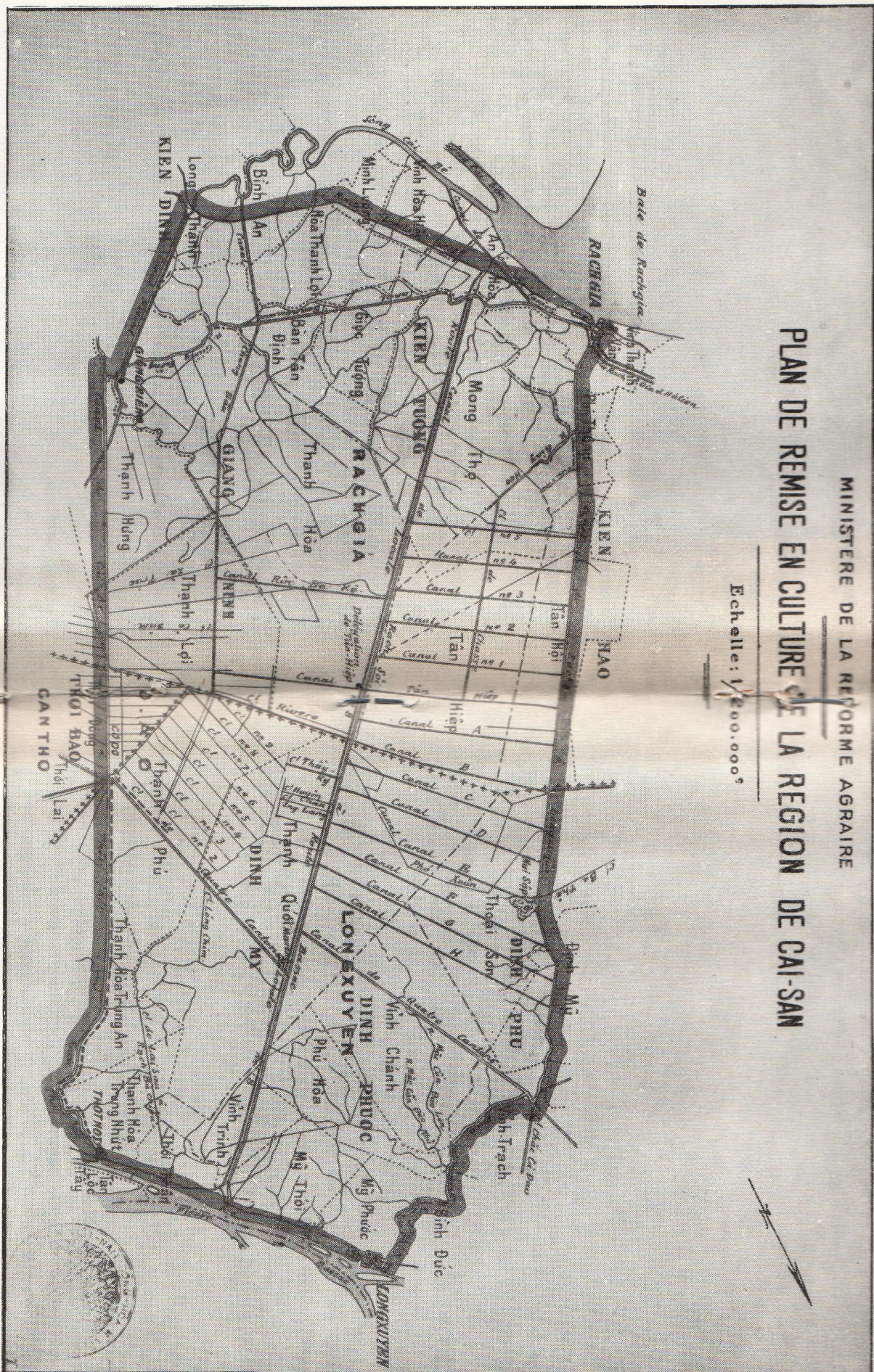
Administration.

The fact that most refugees came south under the leadership of their priest, pastor or bonze made the problem of resettlement

MINISTÈRE DE LA RÉFORME AGRICOLE

PLAN DE REMISE EN CULTURE DE LA RÉGION DE CAI-SAN

Echelle: 1/200,000



RESETTLEMENT PLAN IN CAI SAN AREA

much easier than it might have been otherwise. The Government has thus been able to deal directly with the village itself instead of an unorganized mass of individual refugees. Though the spiritual leader has acted as the administrative leader until each village was firmly enough established to elect a mayor, the Government agents have also played a major role in the distribution material aid and technical advice.

Government Aid.

In addition to 3 hectares of land, each family has also received enough raw material and money to build for itself one of the straw houses already described along with a small rowboat to solve transportation problems. Farming tools, seeds and rice plants have also been distributed, so that each family may cultivate its own garden plot as well as rice paddies. And until the first harvest is sold, each family receives a daily allowance for food.

Under the American Aid programme, the Government has also brought in 100 tractors to plow as many acres of land as the weather and other conditions will allow. At the same time, hundreds of draft buffalo have been imported from Thailand and Cambodia, partly to work under conditions impossible for tractors, partly to make up for the nationwide shortage caused by the war and by the increase in population due to the refugees from the communist North.

Land Reform.

Under the Land Reform Programme, each refugee not only benefits from free Government help in getting a new start in life, but is offered the further possibility of becoming an independent land owner by means of his own hard work. Each family signs a contract with the Government which guarantees security of tenure



ART ALWAYS KEEPS IT IMPORTANT. AND WHILE HUSBANDS ARE WORKING HARD UNDER THE HOT SUN, AT HOME THE GRAND MOTHERS ARE TAKING CARE OF THE LITTLE CHILDREN, AND THE YOUNG WIVES WITH THEIR DEXTEROUS FINGERS ARE MAKING MATS AND BASKETS

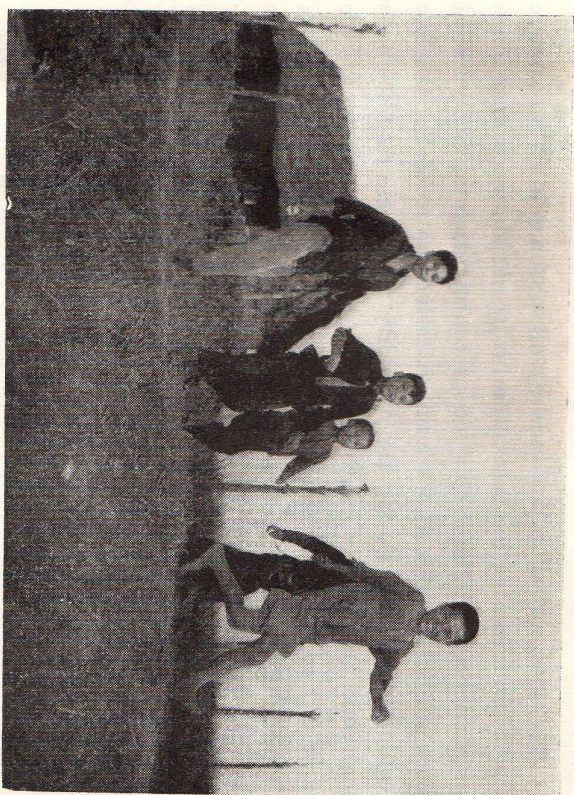
for five years with option for renewal. For the first year, no rent is required at all for abandoned land, such as that at Cai-San, which is difficult to bring under cultivation again. From the second year, the nominal rate rises slowly to the minimum of 15 per cent fixed by law for normal conditions (the maximum is 25 per cent of the value of the annual crop).

In addition to this guarantee of rent control and security of tenure, the Government has passed laws which permit the expropriation of excess land held by private owners. This means that in the Cai-San Project there will soon be even more land available for 50,000 additional refugees — thus bringing the total to 120,000 farmers who will be able to occupy and eventually own their own land.

In the past, farmers in Cai-San as elsewhere throughout Vietnam and most of Asia have been virtually unable to become owners of the land they till. Land reform measures now make all this



THIS REMARKABLE AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF THE IMMENSE RICEFIELDS OF CAI SAN, IN WHICH ONE VIEWS OVER A DOZEN TRACTORS CULTIVATING THE SOIL, SUFFICES TO SHOW THE AMPLITUDE OF THE PROJECT SO PROMISING OF FUTURE PROSPERITY



THE JOY FOR LIFE

possible, but other additional help is required in the form of Agricultural Cooperatives and Agricultural Credit organizations, which prevent ruthless speculators and money lenders from robbing the tenant farmer and some landowners of what they little earned in the past. Emergency measures to offset war damages and help refugees in other ways have already been taken. Government crop insurance for the future protects them as they have never been protected before from other natural and social hazards. Government Agricultural Credit allows them to acquire their own vitally necessary water buffalo and such other draft animals as oxen.

Government welfare extends as well to such vital areas as public health. Fourteen easily accessible health dispensaries have been installed between the canals plus a central hospital composed of three medical clinics at the administrative centre of the Cai-San region at Tan-Hiep. So far, the mortality and illness rate has been negligible. Despite the great numbers of mosquitoes, which are the curse of rice fields the world over, none in Cai-San are malarial; and the only existing cases of malaria are those which the refugees had contracted in the North or on their way South. However harmless, the mosquitoes are still a great nuisance to both man and beast; so that the Government has begun a campaign to wipe them out with insecticide powder dusted over the area by airplane.

Results.

These, then, are the conditions of life as the visitor finds them at Cai-San.

But what are the results in terms of production, and what are the reactions of the refugee farmers and former inhabitants who have returned to the region after more than ten years of absence?

As an experiment in resettlement and land reform, Cai-San has proved itself overwhelmingly successful. The first year's harvest promises to exceed the estimated 45,000 tons of paddy — and this in spite of unexpected natural difficulties which were heroically overcome by the inhabitants. For the rainy season, which began a month early, upset the planting schedule; and then, early in November, there came a terrible typhoon that caused considerable damage.

The rainy season also affected the experimental use of tractors, which nevertheless were able to clear and plow 34,560 acres of land in contrast to only 2,470 acres that had to be cultivated by hand in the traditional slow manner with the help of draft buffalo.

The reaction of the farmers themselves can therefore be seen not only in the enthusiasm with which the refugees particularly have welcomed the chance to start a new life in the South, but also in the way in which both new and former inhabitants have met every challenge of Nature.

Despite these material difficulties, the farmers of Cai-San and the whole Mekong River delta, where the soil is rich and productive, have a far easier time of it than in the less temperate North from which the refugees fled. Politically as well as agriculturally — for they have also escaped from the Communist tyranny where « land reform » ultimately means slavery on collective farms.

Democratic socialism, on the other hand, means something else as it has been applied by the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem. It means that every farmer has the right and duty to offer constructive suggestions not only to remedy those difficulties which have natural or social causes, but also to offer ideas for making the project even more successful in the future. Such suggestions as well as disagreements are presented to the elected representatives of each community who appeal when necessary to the Government administration which gives a sympathetic hearing.

As a pioneering venture, Cai-San shows great promise that the future will prove as successful as the present. Cai-San is the first attempt of a permanent resettlement of refugees on the land. Until Cai-San, hundreds of thousands of refugees lived strictly on Government subsistence without seemingly much hope of being provided with the means whereby they could become economically self-sufficient and independent. The settlement of refugees on land is in general closely connected with the problem of reclaiming the area of abandoned land of South Viet-Nam, concentrated mainly in Cai-San, Ca-Mau and the Plaine des Jones and of the great Mekong River delta. As long as any of this land remains idle, not only the Government but the Vietnamese people suffer a great economic loss. In order that the nation may again become the great rice exporter that it was before the war (about 1,200,000 tons each year), most of this land must be put back under cultivation.

Cai-San has inaugurated this movement. Already the success of the Cai-San Project has induced many farmers who formerly cultivated the land but abandoned it during the war years to leave the cities and take up farming once again. In short, Cai-San continues to be a dramatic experiment not only as a means of resettling refugees, but also as an example of what can be done through land reform to revive the agricultural economy of the country.



PEACEFUL PICTURE IN CAI SAN AREA

LIKE BEFORE IN NORTH VIETNAM, THESE REFUGEES ARE SHOWN IN THIS PICTURE QUIETLY LOOKING AT THE FRUITS OF THEIR LABOR NEAR THEIR NEW VILLAGE WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN RESETTLED

A FEW STATISTICS ON CAI-SAN

(1) Geography :

Length	35 miles
Width	16 —
Area	270,000 acres

(2) Technical achievements (canals dug) :

Northern zone	14 canals (incl. one « canal de chasse »)
Southern zone	3 —
Total	17
Average length	7 1/2 miles
Total length	125 miles
Total quantity soil removed :	1,860,000 cubic meters

(3) Resettlement :

Former inhabitants ..	20,000
Refugees	50,000
Total	70,000
Refugees to be settled in future	50,000
GRAND TOTAL	120,000

(4) Allotment : Number of lots of 3 hectares (7.41 acres) each marked out on the 16 inhabited canals :

Canal 1, 648 lots
— 2, 616 —
— 3, 596 —
— 4, 586 —
— 5, 314 —
Tan-Hiep, 374 —

Canal A,	662	—
— B,	581	—
— C,	537	—
— D,	656	—
— E,	618	—
— F,	505	—
— G,	464	—
— H,	217	—
Rivera,	468	—
Thay-Ky,	244	—

TOTAL.. 8,086 lots

(5) Present number of families and houses 7,500

(6) American Aid :

a) Direct aid	100 tractors
b) Counterpart funds	VN \$ 400,000,000
Total value	US \$ 1,000,000

(7) Daily food allowance (four piasters per person from February to May 1956) VN \$ 6,407,368

(8) Other Expenses during First Phase (through June 30, 1956) :

a) Refugees (transport, provisional and permanent housing)	VN \$ 21,993,207
b) Agrarian Reform (personnel, farm machinery and equipment)	7,562,911
c) Public Works (personnel, canal excavation, etc..)	50,805,026
d) Agriculture (seeds, small-scale breeding, etc..)	8,635,072
e) Administration and planning staff (personnel, equipment, etc..)	649,010
TOTAL	VN \$ 89,625,181

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NOTE : Each 3-hectare lot measures 30 meters wide, 1,000 meters deep.